

We're the rhythm of the darkest nights

Waking Up the Giants - I

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We're the rhythm of the darkest nights by emilyonstars

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Summary:

The anniversaries are the hardest.

None of them talk about it, how the nightmares comes back tenfold and with a bloodthirsty vengeance every July.

We're the rhythm of the darkest nights

Author's Note:

I got a tumblr quote prompt from denbroughbill on tumblr that inspired this.

I never expected it to grow into a 3.3k fic, but alas, I could not seem to stop writing.

I did not edit this because I'm lazy, so please tell me if you see any errors.

TW: Homophobic slurs

I really enjoyed writing this, and I may continue this, but I'm not sure.

Please tell me what you think! I'd love to know (:

The anniversaries are the hardest.

None of them talk about it, how the nightmares comes back tenfold and with a bloodthirsty vengeance every July. They don't have to. It's evident in the dark circles under everyone's eyes, how they are all exhausted but secretly too afraid to sleep. So they stay out as late as they can, until the streetlights come on, spending more time at the quarry and Mike's Grandad's farm than anywhere near the Barrens. Because even though they defeated It, the trauma doesn't go away, and the nightmares have the facility to twist and warp themselves into terrors that are somehow worse than that of what they saw down in that sewer two years ago. There's a semblance of reality to these new night terrors that seems to put them all in a chokehold, gasping for breath long into the morning hours; that seems to haunt them regardless of how many times they remind themselves that It's gone.

They had only spoken about it once, last summer, in the questionable hours between night and dawn, bundled up in sleeping bags in Denbrough's living room, just days before what would have been

Georgie's eighth birthday.

"I-I still have n-n-nightmares," Bill said, staring down into his lap at his torn cuticles, where the skin around his fingernails had been picked until it was red and painful. A stillness settled around the room, a collective held breath that asked *are we actually talking about this?* Even beneath the yellow lights of the table lamps, Bill looked ashen and pale.

"Me too," Beverly whispered, and a few congruous, sympathetic sounds followed.

"Henry Bowers is always in mine," Mike said, with a sad, encouraging smile in Bill's direction, and no one had to ask to remember what had happened between the boy and their infamous bully to know what haunted Mike's nightmares. "And my parents, of course."

Bill lifted up his head, "T-these new ones," he said, staring unseeingly at the group of them, sitting in a halfhearted circle in the middle of the room, "My p-p-parents are t-there." There's a forlorn, faraway look in his eyes and Eddie knows that that Bill's reliving the nightmares over again in his head. "They...they b-blame me. They t-tell me that they w-w-wish that I had...that I'd d-d-died instead," Bill forced out, voice cracking, eyes shining with unshed tears in the lamp light.

The temporary paralysis that had seemed to befallen them all shattered then, as they all moved at once to swarm around Bill, pulling him into a suffocating group hug, murmuring reassurances in the gaps between them all. They eventually fell asleep, dried remnants of tears on their cheeks, in a grouping best describes as a

dogpile, and promptly never spoke of it again. Eddie hadn't shared that night, too afraid to bring his terrors into the light, secretly ashamed of what not-entirely-out-of-the-realm-of-possibility tinged fears he harboured.

Eddie has nightmares all year round, but they are never quite as frequent or so vivid as they seem to be around the anniversaries. He can handle the typical bad dreams; the ones where he forgets to wear pants to school or the ones where his mom catches him doing or saying "inappropriate" things and bans him from his friends again. Those are easy, a cake walk really, by comparison. They're nothing like the anniversary dreams.

Eddie's imagination has never been all that spectacular, his dreams always hazy and blurry, the details undefined like he's purposefully unfocused his eyes, everything running together like a drippy watercolor painting. But Eddie's anniversary dreams are almost lucid. He knows he's dreaming, that they're not real, but they *feel* real, sharp and vibrant like they're happening in real time, and that's what makes them terrifying. Not terrifying like child eating shapeshifter clown that feeds off your fear scary, but scary in the sense that it's all the things he worries about in the back of his mind come true. And that's where we finds himself again tonight, terrorized by his subconscious on a stickily warm July night.

Eddie's sitting in their usual semi-circle in the dirt surrounding the quarry, perched on a weather worn boulder. They're all together; even Beverly is there, having returned the summer before after convincing her aunt to move to Derry from Portland, her red hair bright like lit flames under the afternoon sun. Eddie can smell the earth, the sweet scent of the wildflowers that grow in resilient little tufts out of the rocks, and the tang of the pixi stix powder on Richie's hands beside him. He can feel the heat of the sun bearing down on them, the almost cool breeze blowing across the water on his skin. He's been here before — in real life, undoubtedly, but also in both his

dreams and nightmares. And this is a nightmare, identical in every way as it was two nights ago and a icy ball of dread forms in the pit of his stomach.

Eddie feels the words bubbling up inside him like the fizz in an over-shook soda bottle and he tries to force it down, to swallow the words once he feels them on the tip of his tongue, but he blurts it out anyways: "I'm gay." Everyone stills around him, Mike stopping mid-sentence from recounting some interesting tale he learned from one of his books, and they stare at him with large, judging eyes. Eddie desperately tries to jerk himself awake — *if he could just move a one finger* — because he knows this is going to get ugly really fast.

"I'm not surprised," says Stan, his face screwed up in a sour expression, like he sucked on a lemon, "I always knew you were a faggot." The reactions are always the same as the time before, like these nightmare shadows of his friends are reading off a script. But it hurts every time.

"That's disgusting," spits Beverly, and she pushes herself up from her seat in the dirt and stalks away, only glancing back to glower at Eddie in utter revulsion. Ben follows her out without a word.

"They still execute gays, y'know," Mike says as he turns to leave, the expression on his face a mix of hatred and something akin to pity. "Maybe the should."

Bill towers over him. "I'm s-s-sorry, Eddie." Bill always apologizes, but somehow it just makes it all the more painful. "B-but we can't be f-f-friends with a f-fag. It's j-j-just wrong." One by one, his friends stand up and walk away, leaving Eddie to sit alone awash in his own self-hatred.

The last one to leave is always Richie, and he stares at Eddie with a barely constrained fury in his eyes, magnified by the thick lenses of his glasses, his mouth twisted in an hideous scowl.

“How could you?” Richie demands, and Eddie flinches at the acid in his voice. “Look at me, Eddie!” Eddie didn’t even realize that he had turned to stare at his shoes. “How could you let me hug you? How could you let me sleep in your bed? When you knew all this time? How could you take advantage of me like that, *your best friend* ? That’s so *dirty* , Eddie.”

Dirty. Dirty. Dirty.

The words begin to run on a loop, Richie’s voice fading in and out as the sound warps, growing more feminine, veiled with a thin veneer of forced cordiality, the sickly saccharine tone his mother always uses when something’s “for his own good.” *Queers are dirty, Eddie-Bear ; the words reverberate through his skull. So impure. They all go to Hell, Eddie. But we don’t have to worry about that. You’re my good boy, Eddie, you’re clean.*

Eddie jolts awake, flying upright in his bed, the blankets pooling in his lap. He dry heaves over the side of his bed, the phantom of his mother’s words still ringing in his head. His face is red, cheeks wet with tears he didn’t realize he was crying. Eddie wheezes, struggling to breathe, and he scrambles to grab his inhaler off the nightstand. He knows it’s all fake, that he’s not actually asthmatic, but it always helps loosen the fist of anxiety and panic clutching his lungs. He stuffs the inhaler in his mouth, breathing in the acidic taste of the salbutamol like it’s his last lifeline.

Eddie cradles his inhaler in his hands in the fetal position, the angry and disgusted faces of his friends flashing in his mind. *It’s not real* ,

Eddie reminds himself. *It's not real*. His friends wouldn't treat him like that. They've been friends for so long, been through so much. Eddie racks his mind for any memories of his friends responding with that must hostility. They were probably that mean to Bower's gang, maybe that fucking clown, but they deserved it ten fold. Eddie doesn't deserve that sort of treatment, right?

He recalls a moment back in the spring when he and Ben came across crude signs pasted on the side of the Pharmacy, HOMO SEX IS IMMORAL, and GOD HATES FAGS, handwritten on white paper in red marker. Ben had stopped in front of the signs and frowned deeply, the corners of his mouth turning down so far it was almost comical.

"I don't understand," Ben had said, turning to look at Eddie who had froze beside him. Eddie tried to school his face into an expressionless mask. He probably just looked constipated.

"What do mean?" Eddie asked, and closed his eyes, almost afraid to hear what Ben said next. The words burned on the inside of his eyelids like they were a brand.

"Why does it matter? Why do people care so much?" Ben said, genuine confusion in his voice. "Why do people care if others are gay?"

Eddie exhaled in a puff, "I-I don't know, Ben."

Ben, the ever hopeless romantic, smiled a small smile and said, "One can't help who they love."

Thinking about that moment gave Eddie a small semblance of hope, flickering in his chest like a firefly, but it's short lived; the nagging voice in the back of his head interjected. Ben's always been more of a follower. If everyone else walked, especially Beverly, then Ben would, too. Eddie curls in on himself a bit tighter, as if he could protect himself from his own mind if he makes himself as small as possible.

Unbidden, a voice is back, louder this time, but it's not the voice of his friends. It's crazed and angry, all over the place in pitch. The voice of that goddamn clown that Eddie can never seem to fully forget even though they defeated It and it's been two years since. It bounces around in his head like an echo in a cavern. *I'm every nightmare you ever had! I am your worst dream come true! I'm everything you were ever afraid of!* Eddie laughs, a painful, broken sound, in the darkness of his bedroom. They may have beat Pennywise but Eddie's still afraid. *They beat It* but he's still scared. Eddie wishes he could fearless now.

Another memory pushes itself to the forefront, wielding a baseball bat. It's Richie, from *that* day. In his imagination, Eddie envisions Richie beating the other thoughts away, the other memories. Eddie would never admit it, but thinking of Richie always helps — with his bad jokes and even worse impressions. Richie with his fierce loyalty, who is always there when it really matters, and even there when it really doesn't. Eddie wants to believe that Richie wouldn't hate him for being... *that* . Wants to believe that none of them would, but Richie most of all. And Eddie knows why, but he can't even bear to voice the thought even in his own head.

“But soft what light through yonder window breaks *wind*. ” It takes Eddie a solid ten seconds to realize that Richie's voice wasn't coming from inside his head. When he opens his eyes, he finds Richie crouched precariously outside his bedroom window, one outstretched

arm hanging onto the roof shingles above. Richie shoves the window open from the outside and tumbles into Eddie's bedroom.

"Richie?" Eddie asks dumbly, as though he isn't staring at him from across the room. "What are you doing here?"

"Your window was open, Juliet," Richie replies, pulling off his dirty sneakers and dumping them on the floor beneath the window sill. "Were you expecting me?"

"No, I was expecting the other weird teenage boy that crawls through my window," Eddie says, and he can hear the rasp in his voice from crying. He hopes that Richie doesn't notice.

"Hey." Eddie can tell by the softness in Richie's voice that he definitely did notice. Richie crosses from the window to Eddie's bed in three long strides and then plops himself down at the foot of the bed, narrowly missing sitting on Eddie's feet. The room is bathed in the yellow light of Eddie's table lamp as Richie tugs on the chain. Eddie feels exposed under Richie's searching gaze. "You've been crying."

Eddie futilely scrubs his hands against his cheeks and eyes to try and rid his face of any evidence.

"Nightmare?" Richie asks, his eyes huge and warm, and impossibly soft behind his glasses.

"Yeah," Eddie mumbles. He scoots over and Richie moves to fill the space beside him in Eddie's tiny twin sized bed. Richie's grown long and gangly in his few teen years, folding up beside Eddie like his limbs are too long and he doesn't really know what to do with them.

“I have them, too,” Richie states in a surprisingly soothing tone and reaches over to straighten the collar of Eddie’s pajama top.

Eddie wonders briefly what terrorizes Richie in his nightmares. If he still is scared of werewolves like he was when they were kids, or if he’s still afraid of clowns like he was then. Somehow, maybe intuitively, Eddie feels that Richie’s probably scared of something worse, something more visceral, more nuanced. Like Bill’s nightmares of his parents wishing he had died instead. Like Eddie losing all the people he loves the most just by being true to himself.

Richie gives Eddie a small, reassuring smile that looks entirely out of place of his face.

“You do?” Eddie asks, and looks down at his inhaler still tightly gripped in his hands.

“Definitely,” Richie says, “Your mom and I break up and I can never see my Eddie Spaghetti again.”

A laugh bursts out of Eddie’s mouth before he can stop it. It’s not even funny, really, but it breaks the stiffness in the room. “I’d miss you, but I’d miss your mom’s swee-”

“Gross!” Richie just flashes Eddie a wide, crooked smile.

The lay in silence for an immeasurable amount of time — five minutes, thirty, and hour? Eddie can't tell — pressed side-by-side, Richie's bony elbow digging into Eddie's spleen. Until Eddie can't ignore the pressing need to just say something, the nightmare still dancing at the edges of his mind, snippets of dialogue flitting around.

"They just keep getting worse, you know?" Eddie says and it feels way too loud for the silence of the room. "The dreams, I mean."

"Yeah," Richie agrees. "Sometimes your mom doesn't even give me a kiss to remember her by." Eddie knows that Richie's just using bad humor to evade, but he doesn't say anything. Richie surprises him then, as though he has some sort of sixth sense and somehow knows. "We'd never leave you, y'know."

Eddie turns and stares at Richie with wide eyes. *How does he know?*

"We love you, no matter what, Eds," Richie keeps looking up at the ceiling. "I mean, unless you go all Zodiac Killer on us or somethin'."

Richie turns and meets Eddie's eye then, sees the questioning, half-scared look on his face.

"You talk in your sleep," Richie explains.

"What...what do I say?"

"Uh...once you said, 'guys, please don't go,' and 'I thought we were a family.'" They're both back to looking at the ceiling at this point. "You cried out for Bill once, during a sleepover." Eddie remembers

that night. Same nightmare, but he put up a fight then, trying to keep them all from abandoning him. Bill had awoken that night and sat up through the night with Eddie until just before daybreak. They hadn't spoken of the dream, just sat in Bill's living room and watched Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle reruns with the closed captioning on so as to not wake anyone else.

Eddie shakily exhales. *Richie didn't know.* Eddie doesn't know if he's relieved or disappointed.

Would you still talk to me like that if you knew?

"I...I get scared and start to think of you." Eddie blurts out, and wants to take it back as soon as he says it, embarrassment flooding his cheeks. He wishes the lamp wasn't on so he could hide in the dark, but if he turned it off now it would be too obvious. Richie doesn't respond for just long enough of a time for it to feel uncomfortable and Eddie debates taking it back, make a half-assed joke out of it, *'cause your face is the scariest thing I've ever seen.*

He opens his mouth to speak but Richie beats him to it.

"Is it true," Richie says slowly, in this gentle, almost imploring tone that Eddie's never heard him use before. "Do you think of me, too?"

Eddie feels like his throat is closing up, his face burning. His fingers twitch on his inhaler but he doesn't dare lift it to his mouth. His head swims. "Yeah," Eddie whispers. *I think of you all the time*, Eddie's heart yells at him. *I think of your stupid jokes and they make me feel better.* Eddie refuses to say that aloud. Richie would never let it go. *I always feel better with you here.* What he actually says, however, is: "You...think of me?"

“Yeah.” Richie says breathily, like he’s in awe of this new information — Eddie knows the feeling — but then quickly recovers. They fall back into familiar territory like it’s a refuge. They won’t speak of any of this in the morning. “I think of this cute Spaghetti face and, *poof* , all better!” Eddie smacks Richie’s hands away as he tries to pinch at his pinkened cheeks. “Cute, cute, cute!”

“ *Spaghetti face* ? Are you serious?” Richie just laughs and moves to ruffle Eddie’s hair. Eddie shoves him back as far as he can go until Richie’s back hits the wall beside the bed.

“Hey, Eds?”

“What? I hate when you call me that,” Eddie says instinctively.

“C’mere?” Richie’s turned on his side facing Eddie still, his arms spread open wide in invitation, looking hopeful. Eddie hesitates.

How could you let me hug you?

How could you let me sleep in your bed?

That little reassuring smile is back.

“I won’t bite,” Richie says, and makes grabby hands at Eddie, followed by a wink that’s a few beats too long. “Not unless you want me to.”

We'd never leave you, y'know.

We love you, no matter what, Eds.

Do you think of me, too?

Eddie takes a deep breath and decides to be selfish. He scoots across the small space between them and lets Richie wrap his gangly noodle arms around him, ignoring the fact that Richie's still wearing the same outfit he wore the entire day before, and the way that he smells like old sweat and cigarette smoke.

If — *when* he tells them, he decides, he'll let it happen. He'll face the music. Eddie's faced worse things, right? But for now he's going to pretend that none of it's possible; that Richie's right and they'll all still love him regardless. For now, he's going to let Richie hold him.

When Eddie falls back to sleep, it's dreamless.

Author's Note:

Thanks for reading!
Let me know your thoughts!

p.s. I'm eddiespaghettio on tumblr.
Please send me prompts! It would make my whole month!